

# Hunting Performance Test for Scent Hounds

By Jo Ann Hilliker

Basset Hounds have been important part of my life for the last 25 years. They are often described a clowns, problem solvers, hard headed, and couch potatoes. Couch Potato!? Not anymore.

Since the Basset Hound Club of America introduced the Hunting Performance Test for Basset Hounds, Dachshunds, Beagles and Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen (PBGV), my hounds are hunting dogs!

The Hunting Performance Test is a non-competitive test of hunting ability designed to provide a hunting experience for hounds that can't or don't compete in field trials. The test is a great opportunity for hounds in geographic areas that do not support field trials. Spayed and neutered hounds are welcomed, too. In Florida our tests draw a mixture of show dogs, family pets, performance dogs (agility, obedience, rally, tracking), and potential breeding hounds. All hounds must be registered with the American Kennel Club or have been issued an AKC ILP number. The owners all want to give their hounds a chance to hunt and to have recognition that their hounds do hunt well.

The Hunting Performance Test scores hounds on many of the same skills use in field trials, with two exceptions. The hounds are cast in the hunting field and must search for their own rabbit to run. The second difference is that a starter pistol is fired while the dog is running rabbit and giving voice. We have never had a hound to fail the gun shyness test at one of our tests.

The other criteria used to judge the hounds are line ability, adaptability, determination and use of voice. Each stake has 30 minutes to find a rabbit. The judges allow the hounds to work until they have seen enough to score the dog.

Each criterion is scored on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being the best. The dog must score at least a 5 in each area and average a 6 overall to pass. The test is pass/fail. Every hound can be a winner.

The judges of the Hunting Performance Test are expected to understand that each of the four breeds has a different style of hunting rabbits. We don't expect a basset to behave like a beagle or a dachshund to give voice like a basset. The PBGV has a unique start but settles down to serious searching after a few minutes in the field. Two judges score each stake.

Three classes are available; Solo, Brace and Two-coupled Pack. The owners decide which hounds run together in brace and pack. The hounds can be owned by the same individual or they can each have a different owner. In brace and pack, the same hunting criteria are used as in solo, but when the first dog finds a rabbit and gives voice, the other(s) are expected to honor. The brace or pack should then work as a team.

Three levels of recognition are available: Hunting Hound, Senior Hunting Hound and finally for those dogs that have completed all three classes. Master Hunting Hound. The title Master Hunting Hound Excellent is given to hounds who qualify as a Master Hunting Hound and also have points at an AKC Conformation show.

Hunting Performance Tests are currently being held in the following states: Washington, Colorado, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Basset Hound Club members elsewhere are looking for owners of the other hound breeds to partner with them in hosting additional tests. Since the tests are frequently offered in areas without field trials, cooperation and participation of all four breeds insures that each test has a full entry and can break even on income and expenses. The schedule of test is available at the Basset Hound Club of America web site.

The Hunting Performance Test committee of BHCA has developed a workbook on the Test to help people understand the test and how to host one. The Hunting Performance Test Workbook Course #404 is available online here as well as Scent and the Scenting Dog Course #402. (web site edit to reflect new web address)

My own bassets do their share of shows, agility, tracking and pet life, but have all become enthusiastic hunters after being allowed to hunt to prepare for the Hunting Performance Test. I have been amazed as how quickly they learn... What a joy to hear that basset bay when on the trail of a rabbit!

However we have encountered a few problems along the way. Once my dogs started to hunt they did not want to stop hunting. They have been very clever figuring out ways to 'get out' and hunt. Luckily I live in a rural area with lots of farm land close by but I have spent many hours searching for a hunting hound or two. Recently a couple of neighbor boys watched me following tracks down a sand road. They asked if I was looking for a basset.

"Yes! He is a hunting dog. I am sure he is running rabbit." I responded. "Follow us," they replied. I drove into their yard and their father came out of the house and said, "Are you looking for a basset?" Again, I said, "Yes, have you seen him?" "Come inside," he said... And what did I see? My basset was sprawled on their couch sleeping! One boy said, "He came in the yard this morning, He's been sleeping all afternoon. He was a tired pup!" Maybe I need to re-think the "couch- potato" description of bassets!

The Hunting Performance Test has proven to be a great experience for my bassets and me. Join us.

Happy hunting!

Jo Ann Hilliker, Former Chair

BHCA Hunting Performance Test

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